

CHAPTER 1

The Legacy of Lalage Bown: An Inclusive and Post-colonial Vision for Adult Learning and Education

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Abstract:

This chapter introduces the work of Lalage Bown: a highly influential practitioner, researcher and activist who was passionately committed to the role which adult education could play in supporting social justice aims. The four main themes of the book are outlined: adult education and social justice; decolonisation, post-colonialism and indigenous knowledge; from literacy to lifelong learning; and, policy development and supporting future generations of adult educators.

Keywords: Adult Education and Learning; Inequality; Lalage Bown; Post-colonial; Social Justice

... may we uphold: the Way, seen as open and equal access: the Truth, seen as real knowledge and not trivia; and the Life, seen as the length of time during which we should pursue these values.

Lalage Bown, Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education. "Charge to the Graduates". Adapted from the Latin motto of the University of Glasgow, *Via Veritas Vita*. April 2002

Introduction

The world currently faces three major, interrelated, crises. Firstly, the lives of countless millions of people are threatened as a direct result of climate change, in addition to challenges posed to the survival of many, possibly most, other

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species. Secondly, migration levels have reached a scale unprecedented since Second World War. Thirdly, there are significant threats to democratic principles and the maintenance of peace as a result of the growth of neo-nationalism and authoritarianism. In this context, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – although somewhat battered and weakened – remain beacons for the promotion of the value of education and learning, within and between the global north and south, *for all*.

For over seven decades, Lalage Bown was a highly influential practitioner, researcher and activist who was passionately committed to the role of adult education in supporting social justice aims, especially in relation countries emerging from colonial domination in the ‘global south’ poorer regions of the world. She placed great emphasis on strengthening connections between universities, NGOs, civic society and public policy with a view to taking positive action in favour of the educationally disadvantaged. Given the triple crises mentioned above it is reasonable to inquire as to whether such (worthy) aims for adult learning and education are in danger of remaining no more than lofty ambitions.

In this book, distinguished scholars and practitioners from different disciplines and different global regions explore the contemporary relevance of these values, concepts and methods for future developments in policy, practice, advocacy and research in adult education aimed at promoting inclusion and social justice.

Lalage Bown’s far reaching influence earned her the epithet ‘the mother of adult education in Africa’. Over her long life working in many parts of Africa, including in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia, in Europe, notably her home country, the United Kingdom, she moved between universities, NGOs and official positions with a passion for promoting access for people of all ages and stages of life: and, underlying all her work lay a deep commitment to striving to achieve greater equality for women. When she sadly died at the age of 94 in 2021 the outpouring of tributes reflected the impact she had made on so many people from so many different parts of the world and walks of life.

The four of us, who are co-editors of this book, had the great pleasure of knowing her professionally and personally over many years. We believed it important to find a way in which her intellectual work might be honoured – and analysed – as a contribution to her enduring legacy. We each had the privilege of working with her in different capacities and in different parts of the world: Michael Omolewa in Nigeria and other parts of Africa as well as internationally with bodies such as UNESCO; Heribert Hinzen, also in Africa and a range of international adult education organisations; Maria Slowey and Mike Osborne more closely working with her in the UK, particularly in Scotland as her successors as chairs of adult education at the University of Glasgow – and, for Maria, also in Ireland.

This introductory chapter is divided into three parts. In the first, we reflect on Lalage Bown’s vision for adult education, and her enduring influence on international developments and organisations. In the second, we draw particular attention to her lifelong passion for the people, culture and general well being of the people of many countries in Africa – promoting adult education for all and

embodying a post-colonial perspective. The third part introduces the purpose, themes and authors of the book.

1. Lalage Bown: Impact on International Developments in Adult Education

The post-Second World War period saw a resurgence of interest and opportunity in international adult education, with UNESCO playing a central role in facilitating engagement between adult educators – including practitioners, researchers and policy makers – in a series of international conferences, including: Elsinore, Denmark (1949); Montreal, Canada (1960); Tokyo, Japan (1972); and Paris, France (1983). The deliberations in Elsinore were highly influenced at the time by the search for peace; Montreal saw engagement by the new independent states after the fall of colonialism; Tokyo served to deepen understanding adult education as a profession; while the Paris conference was highly politicised by cold war fears and hesitations (Knoll 2014).

Shortly after the Paris UNESCO conference, Lalage Bown reflected on the inputs, findings and recommendations and made a succinct presentation on “Current World Trends in Adult Education” during an *International Symposium on Adult Education – New Trends in Education and Occupations of Women*.

A formal and large-scale international conference has limitations, but I have used the Paris conference to show what general world opinion on adult education seems to be. As I have said, such conferences do provide an opportunity to affirm what is generally accepted. Additionally they provide an opportunity for commitment and once these commitments have been made, those of us who are concerned can follow these up and ensure that our governments really act on those commitments – that, as we say, they ‘put their money where their mouth is’. The right to learn is now a formal international commitment and we should translate that right into practice (Bown 1985, 8).

These global gatherings continued to take place every 12 years using the acronym CONFINTEA (from the French – Conférence Internationale sur l’Education des Adultes) and they grew in participation and size: CONFINTEA V in 1997 Hamburg, Germany had some 1500 participants with a large civil society intake; the event in Belém, Brazil in 2009 resulted in the Bélem Framework for Action (BFA) with significant impact on associated debates in a shift from education to learning through *Education for All* to *Lifelong Learning for All* (Hinzen 2013). The most recent conference, CONFINTEA VII, took place in Marrakech, Morocco in 2022 – of which more below.

Although these events aimed to be inclusive, Lalage Bown – speaking from her extensive experience of working in Africa – pointed out at the time, the meetings and agendas were heavily dominated by conceptual assumptions that were mainly derived from the interests, and from the intellectual traditions, of the richer Western states of the developed world (Bown 1983). Despite this concern, however, she also believed that the increasing engagement of representatives from developing countries stimulated new strands in international and comparative adult

education. Their ideas, ways of working, epistemologies combined to changing the character and stances of international meetings by emphasising the importance of considering the nature, purposes and mission of adult education. In particular, she drew attention to the fact that the countries emerging from colonial domination in the poorer regions of the world tended to place an emphasis on locating adult education in the wider context of lifelong learning, defining adult education more broadly than had been the case in many developed countries. This strengthened the connection with public policy, and, centrally, the need for positive action in favour of the educationally disadvantaged. This was a far-sighted view which even today has its relevance with a sense of urgency as shown in the Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 5) (UILb 2022).

Lalage was therefore quite open to debates on how to understand adult education: a concept which today remains subject to different interpretations. However, in the African context, the distinctive values and forms of adult education espoused by Lalage played an important role in assisting the better understanding of communalities, similarities and differences between indigenous (African) approaches (Ocitti 1973) and colonial, missionary, or more widely, Western forms of education and schooling: a debate explored in some depth in “Change and Continuity in African Traditional Adult Education” (Omolewa 1982). There were a number of reasons why this debate grew stronger, and the insights that had previously assumed causality between formal education and development, and the role of formal education within development aid programmes, were more critically discussed in a comparative perspective: as analysed, for example, in “Education – An Obstacle to Development? Reflections on the Political Function of Education in Asia and Africa” (Hanf et al. 1975).

In 1968, an influential book by Philip Coombs, *The World Educational Crisis*, made the case that traditional, formal, education systems around the world were inefficient, emphasising the importance of ‘non-formal education’. In a similar vein, a report *Non-formal Education in African Development* (Sheffield and Diejomaoh 1972) documented experiences of young people and adults who had participated in a variety of community activities in education, training and learning, while a few years later the World Bank published *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Non-formal Education Can Help* (Coombs and Ahmed 1974). Over that period, and subsequently, Lalage showed her commitment to the importance of the value, and practice, of non-formal education. For example, referring to the work of her colleague and friend, Paul Fordham, she commented

The non-formal idea ... is part of a widespread search for alternatives in education which is itself intimately bound up with changing conceptions of development. The term ‘non-formal’ was given currency by development planners rather than educators. Existing terminology was seen as too narrow – while many of the more important programmes (e.g. farmer training) were sometimes not seen as education at all, even by practitioners themselves. What was needed was an all-embracing term for ... ‘educative services’. As it gained

currency, the term also came to include provision for the school-age dropouts and left-outs of the formal system (Bown 1983, 46).

However, it took many more years before a stronger manifestation of the importance of education, training and learning outside formal institutions was taken up more widely, notably in the *UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (UIL 2012).

Lalage Bown realised at an early stage that close collaboration was needed from a triangle of actors in order to build adult education as a movement, a profession, a sub-sector of the education system, as well as an academic discipline: government, civil society and academia (Hall 1995). She therefore supported right from the start the establishment of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) which held its First World Assembly in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the mid-1970s (Hall and Kidd 1978). Lalage served as Rapporteur General to this Assembly (Bown 1976), and at the same time she was also Editor of *CONVERGENCE*, the flagship journal of ICAE (Hinzen 2022). Taking every opportunity to promote adult education- in all forms- she used the journal not only for research dissemination, but also for advocacy purposes: publishing, for example, the draft of an important document *International Instrument on the Development of Adult Education*; this was subsequently adopted by a UNESCO General Conference in Nairobi, Kenya as the *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* (UNESCO 1976). This was certainly a perspicacious document as it was over three decades later before any revision/updating took place (UIL 2010). After thorough consultation processes, including the integration of policy areas arising from the Belém Framework for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Education 2030 Agenda (UNESCO 2015a), the UNESCO General Conference in 2015 adopted a new *Recommendation of Adult Learning and Education* (UNESCO 2015b).

Lalage continued her far-sighted support for the professionalization of people working in the field of adult education, underpinned by research, through her work in university departments in the many countries which provided her base throughout her professional life. One, early example, which encapsulates her approach is the *Handbook of Adult Education for West Africa* which she edited with her Nigerian colleague Olu Tomori (Bown and Tomori 1979).

Almost four decades after Lalage had pointed to new world trends in adult education, as mentioned above, in 2022 CONFINTEA VII took place in Morocco, with over 1,000 participants attending in person and on-line. The specific objective was to examine adult learning and education policies within a lifelong learning perspective and within the framework of the UNESCO SDGs. Member States committed themselves

to using the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a roadmap for the development of transversal skills, recognizing how this agenda brings cohesion and synergy to the multifaceted goals of ALE for the years to come. Quality education and lifelong learning are important mechanisms for implementing

SDG 4 and are also prerequisites for poverty reduction (SDG 1), health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), gainful employment and decent jobs (SDG 8), inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (SDG 11), just, peaceful, inclusive, violence-free societies (SDG 16) and climate action (SDG 13).

Furthermore, adult education is part of the right to education and crucial for the realization of all human rights (UIL 2022a, 15, emphasis added).

In this vein, ICAE had previously reinforced the importance of «strengthening the institutional structures (like community learning centres, for delivering ALE [adult learning and education]) and securing the role of ALE staff» as well as «improving in-service and pre-service education, further education, training, capacity building and employment conditions of adult educators» (ICAE 2020, 13), which are reflected in the UNESCO Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) that states:

We stress the key role of teachers and educators, including volunteer tutors and other professionals engaged in adult learning and education. We commit to implementing policies and strategies to upskill and further professionalize and specialize adult educators through pre-service, in-service and continuing training – in association with universities and research institutes – and by improving their working conditions, including their salaries, status and professional development trajectories. We further recognize ALE competency frameworks as strategic instruments for the professionalization of educators and the enhancement of their qualifications (UILa 2022, 11).

In advance of the Marrakech conference there were many attempts to understand better what had been achieved and where lessons needed to be learnt. A special issue of the *International Review of Education* reflected on topics such as «Africa: Education as a Source of Restoration» and «Future Visions of ALE and Lifelong Learning» (Benavot et al. 2022, 178, 175). All those familiar with Lalage's work can well imagine how she would have been a dynamic and inspirational contributor to these debates in which her experience around the globe, along with her commitment to social justice, would play a distinctive role.

We can also imagine her articulating her views in a favourite proverb of hers (drawn from the Akan in Ghana) «A Rusty Person is Worse than Rusty Iron»: as quoted in her acceptance speech when she was the first woman to be awarded the William Pearson Tolley Medal for Distinguished Leadership in Adult Education, Syracuse University (Bown 1975).

The 1970s saw a first cycle of discourses on *The Limits to Growth* which was led by the Club of Rome and showed already clearly that the development model of the time was not contributing to a sustainable future but – as we understand even better today – was having a disastrous effect on our climate. And there was another concerned debate about the impact of colonization, on development – and underdevelopment – often influenced by the influential study *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney 1972). Current debates on failed de-coloniza-

tion are equally relevant as much of data which on the global impact of climate change were already available in the early 1970s (Meadows et al. 1974).

2. Lalage's Exceptionalism in Africa

So, in many respects Lalage was totally different to many Europeans who worked in Africa in the colonial and post-colonial periods. As the overview of her biography in Chapter 2 indicates, although she returned to work in UK in 1981 she was no less active in her advocacy for adult education in Africa.

Once she resolved to contribute to the advancement of Africa, she never wavered, nor did she allow the challenges of working in the Region to change her mind. Here again, she is different from many British personnel who quickly resolved to return 'home' due to the harshness of the weather or the frustrations arising from bureaucratic hindrances, which prevented them from working maximally on their dreams for the development of the region. Some examples abound, one of the best known being the experience of Major Arthur John Carpenter who was recruited as Mass Education Officer in Nigeria, but who took an early retirement at age 45 in protest against the obstacles presented by the colleague officials who refused to allow him to operate the mass education agenda proposed by the British Government in 1944.

Her enthusiasm for Africa's development led to close engagement with the British Council as she lobbied relentlessly for resources for the region for adult education. It was for this reason, for example, that on her return to Britain, she became one of the leading drivers of The Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust founded to promote friendship and understanding through financial support for Nigerian education. She also remained an active member of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth. In addition to mentoring Africans and supporting them in every way she could, Lalage promoted African values. She was often seen in African attire in the streets of Britain and living in homes decorated with African carvings and artefacts, excellent memories of the richness of the African past.

Lalage also identified with Africa in the struggles and aspirations of the continent. It was perhaps her decision to adopt two girls, African twins, that further demonstrated her empathy for service there. The twins had been abandoned as young children, but Lalage took them over, gave them a sound education and a home and saw them to the status of respected positions in life.

There are thus many aspects to her legacy that live on beyond her writing and her work through this international family which she created.

3. Purpose and Themes of the Book

Following this introduction, this book is divided into four main substantive parts, along with a concluding reflection.

The first of these parts addresses the theme of adult education in relation to promotion of equality and social justice, particularly in terms of women's education. Robert Hamilton (University of Glasgow, Scotland) introduces the life

and work of Lalage Bown, outlining her central ideas, methods of working, and impact on policy, practice and research. These concepts are taken up in detail in further chapters. Maria Slowey (Dublin City University, Ireland) who had succeeded Professor Bown as Professor and Director of Adult and Continuing Education at Glasgow University, explores changing conceptions of social purpose higher education through the legacy of university adult education. She traces the historical background to the development of the Glasgow Department, and explores the extent to which, despite the significant changes that have taken place in higher education over recent decades, a social purpose mission can be discerned, albeit in different manifestations.

As mentioned above, Lalage was a champion for women's education for personal development as well as empowerment and social progress. Jean Barr (Glasgow University) reflects on struggles for women's right to education and scholarship. She draws on a case study of women's education in the West of Scotland in the 1980s to illustrate the ways in which women's education for empowerment often tends to thrive in the less formal spaces and concludes with a critique of a current narrowing of adult education's horizons. The theme is pursued further in the chapter by Stella Nwizu (University of Nigeria) and Mejai Bola Mike Avoseh (University of South Dakota) who focus on the crucial importance of women's education in the context of equality and poverty alleviation in Africa.

This part of the book is concluded by Alan Tuckett (University of Wolverhampton), who was previously Director of the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education in England and also President of the International Council for Adult and Continuing Education, roles in which strong advocacy and lobbying on behalf of adult education formed a major part. He highlights the ways in which Lalage also understood that it was possible (though not easy) to persuade policy makers to sign up to broad commitments to lifelong learning for all, but that turning those broad commitments into practical policies affecting poor and marginalised adults, and particularly poor and marginalised women was infinitely harder. He illustrates the importance of advocacy in practice through an examination of three specific examples.

The second substantive part of the book investigates the role of adult education and decolonisation, post-colonialism and indigenous knowledge(s). Chapters address: themes of liberation and empowerment (Michael Omolewa, University of Ibadan Nigeria; Ruphina U. Nwachukwu, University of Nigeria; and, Anne Katahoire, Makerere University, Uganda); institution building (Samir Halliru, and Audu Semiu Aganah, Bayero University, Nigeria); the African experiment in global partnership building (Akpovire Oduaran, North-West University, South Africa; Gbolagade Adekanmbi, University of Botswana; and, Rashid Aderinoye, University of Ibadan, Nigeria); decolonialised language training (Abimbola Abodunrin, Jason Chan, and Srabani Maitra, University of Glasgow, Scotland); and, the decolonial intent, and the emergence of an 'African Voice' (Budd Hall, University of Victoria, Canada; and Michael Omolewa, University of Ibadan, Nigeria).

The third part is entitled “From Literacy to Lifelong Learning” and begins with a chapter by Mia Perry, Marcela Ramos (University of Glasgow, Scotland) and Nancy Palacios (University of the Andes, Colombia) who consider the changing conceptions of literacy. There then follows a chapter from Michael Osborne (University of Glasgow) that relates to the interplay between SDG3 (Health), SDG4 (Education and Lifelong Learning) and SDG11 (Cities) in the context of the capacity strengthening of researchers in the global south. Oluwayemisi Obashoro-John (University of Lagos, Nigeria) and Brian Findsen (University of Waikato, New Zealand) address the important question of supporting lifelong learning for older adults – who are an increasing proportion of the population across the world. Ellen Boeren and Catherine Lido (University of Glasgow, Scotland) conclude this part of the book by exploring the capture of lifelong learning metrics through international surveys and novel innovative methods.

The final and fourth substantive part explores methods to enhance future development of adult learning and education through fostering excellence. Contributors are: Maja Avramovska, Sonja Belete, Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Heribert Hinzen and Levan Kvatchadze (Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul Verband, the German Adult Education Association, Germany [DVV]) who build on the extensive experience over many decades of DVV. Shirley Walters (University of the Western Cape, South Africa) provides an analysis of a distinctive case study «professors of the street», while Ievgenia Dragomirova (Donetsk State University of Management, Ukraine) and Rob Mark (University of Glasgow, Scotland) investigate the education of adult migrants in Europe, drawing on the experiences of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the invasion of their country. Bonnie Slade and Preeti Dagar (University of Glasgow, Scotland) conclude this section investigating the implications for future formation of adult educators given the growing diversity of professionals with roles and responsibilities in this arena.

The final chapter in the book concludes with a personal reflection of the enduring legacy of Lalage Bown, by Richard Taylor (Wolfson College, Cambridge, UK), who had worked over many years with Lalage in different capacities. It focuses on the values that informed her work in adult education over the decades, with considerations on what priorities she might advocate for contemporary adult education policy and practice.

Concluding Comments

Inevitably with the limited space that we have available, we have not been able to include all of those who wished to contribute and to reflect upon the immense contribution that Lalage Bown made to the field of adult education across the globe for seven decades. We thank those that have contributed and hope she would feel we have done our best as editors to do justice to her values and work. We also hope that readers will gain a sense of a life lived to the full, with an unremitting concern with social justice and service.

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